

Landowner _____



WHAT IS CONTOUR FARMING?

Contour farming is using ridges and furrows formed by tillage, planting, and other farming operations to change the direction of runoff directly downslope to around the slope.

PURPOSES

Contour farming is applied on sloping land where crops are grown to:

- Reduce sheet and rill erosion
- Reduce transport of sediment, other solids, and the contaminants attached to them
- Increase water infiltration

HOW IT HELPS THE LAND

Contour farming is a low cost, low maintenance conservation practice. Producers can save valuable topsoil and reduce runoff losses of fertilizer and pesticides by doing tillage and planting operations on the contour. Contour farming also slows runoff and

increases infiltration by trapping water in the contour furrows made by tillage or planting equipment. The improved use of moisture, fertilizer, and chemicals produce higher yields and lower input costs.

WHERE THE PRACTICE APPLIES

Contour farming is used on sloping land planted to crops. It is most effective on land with slopes between 2 and 10 percent. The contour farming practice may be used as a stand alone practice or may be used in conjunction with other conservation practices such as terraces, diversions, and grassed waterways.

WHERE TO GET HELP

For assistance in planning contour farming, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service or your local Conservation District office.

APPLYING THE PRACTICE

Contour lines are laid out much like terrace lines. A level, a helper, and way of marking the lines are all that is needed.

Align the row grade as closely to the contour as possible to achieve the greatest erosion reduction. All tillage and planting operations need to follow the contour established.

When dealing with soils that have slow to very slow infiltration rates or crops which are sensitive to ponding water, row grades should be designed to ensure runoff water does not pond and cause unacceptable crop damage.

The maximum grade of the rows should not exceed one half the up and down hill slope percent.

Up to 25% deviation from the design row grade may be permitted within 150 feet of a stable outlet such as a grassed waterway.

When terraces, diversions or contour buffer strips are present, contour farming will be done parallel with these practices making sure applicable row grade criteria are met.

When row spacing is greater than 10 inches, the minimum ridge height should be 2.0 inches during the time of the year when the soil is most vulnerable to soil erosion.

When the row spacing is less than 10 inches, the minimum ridge height shall be 1 inch during the time of year the soil is most vulnerable to erosion. This is the time of the year when the most soil is exposed in the field. For example: September - October for wheat, or April - May for corn, sorghum or soybeans.

The minimum ridge height is not required in no till/strip till/direct seed systems applied on the contour if at least 50% surface residue is present between the rows after planting.

All runoff created by contour farming should be delivered to a stable outlet.

CONSIDERATIONS

Allow for the deterioration of ridge height throughout the year as a result of harvest operations and normal weathering.

When contour row curvature becomes too sharp to keep machinery aligned with rows during field operations, establish sod turn strips on points or other odd areas as needed.

When terraces or diversions are not present, establish contour markers in the field that will maintain the crop rows at designed grades. Contour markers may be field boundaries, a crop row left untilled, or any other permanent marker.

Contour Farming – Specifications Sheet

Purpose (Check all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Reduce sheet and rill erosion	<input type="checkbox"/> Reduce transport of sediment, other solids, and the contaminants attached to them	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase water infiltration

Field No.	% Slope	Designed Row Grade	Designed Ridge Height	Implements Used For Contouring

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.